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November 17, 1953

REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT ON NEAR EAST MISSION

In pursuance of the mission you entrusted to me on October 7, 1953, I have held initial discussions in the Near East with the Governments of Jordan, Israel, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt.

These discussions had a specific objective: to emphasize the importance which the United States attaches to the recent United Nations report, Unified Development of the Water Resources of the Jordan Valley, and to urge the states concerned to consider with an open mind the forward-looking proposals it contains.

They have without exception indicated willingness to do this, and to undertake discussions on a more definitive basis in several months' time.

This understanding was obtained in an atmosphere of extreme tension deriving from certain incidents which had inflamed public opinion to the danger point just prior to my arrival in the area. It would be difficult to imagine circumstances less conducive to favorable reception of the Jordan Valley proposals, and it is my opinion that only the weight of your personal representations prevented their rejection out of hand. As the result of your indication of personal interest, the way is now open for further consideration of the project and, we may hope, for its eventual acceptance.

In the course of my conversations with leaders in the area, I also took the opportunity of exploring present attitudes on certain of the issues now existing between the Arab nations and Israel with a view to determining what steps, if any, might be taken to remove, or at least ameliorate, the tensions between them.

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It established the principle of mutual interest in seeking to resolve the differences between Israel and her Arab neighbors on a practical basis quite outside the context of political claims and without prejudice to ultimate political decisions.

For these reasons, the concept of unified development of the Jordan Valley should be advanced and supported as a central element of United States policy with respect to the countries concerned. American political and economic cooperation with these countries should be determined in the light of their willingness to accept and abide by the principles embodied in the plan.

The United States should take the strong position that the proposals regarding the Jordan Valley represent a constructive effort to remove the waters of the Jordan from the area of controversy. They are fair and equitable to all the states concerned. Technical objections or suggested modifications on the part of any of the interested states will be considered on their merits, but rejection of the program by any state on purely political grounds would compel the United States to reconsider its whole position with respect to economic cooperation with that state.

B. With respect to the Arab-Israel conflict generally, it is clear that we dare not leave the problem to solve itself. The peril of a policy of drift, based on the assumption that time will iron out the difficulties, has been demonstrated by the recent outbreak of serious border incidents, the quarrel over water rights on the upper Jordan, and other events. The situation is, in fact, deteriorating rather than improving, with resultant danger not only to the security of the Near East but of the world.

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The impasse can be broken, in my opinion, only by the exertion of strong pressure from the outside, mainly by the United States, Britain, and France, in behalf of measures calculated to remove irritants and promote indirect cooperation between the parties on a practical rather than a political level. In the present climate in the region, there is no possibility whatever of a negotiated settlement.

United States policy should therefore contain the following elements:

- 1) The overriding purpose of the United States in the Near East is to re-establish conditions of peace and stability essential to social and economic progress.
- 2) The Government of the United States is prepared to cooperate with the Arab countries and with Israel, both directly and through the United Nations, in any measures that contribute to this end.
- 3) American economic assistance should be conditioned on the willingness of the countries concerned to seek and adopt constructive measures calculated to reduce the area of controversy and eliminate immediate causes of friction.

DISCUSSIONS ON THE JORDAN VALLEY REPORT

In my conversations with the leaders in the region, I expressed the position of the United States in the frankest possible terms and substantially as follows:

One of the most controversial issues between the Arab countries and Israel involves the use of the waters of the River Jordan. Touching upon four sovereign states, this international river can become either a blessing or a curse for the people of the area. Fairly divided and harnessed for irrigation and power, its

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waters can bring some two hundred thousand acres of land in the Jordan Valley into productive use and provide an economic base for hundreds of thousands of people. On the other hand, if left open to unilateral appropriation and development, the waters of the Jordan can become the cause of further controversy, increased friction, bloodshed, and perhaps even war.

The United Nations report thus offers an opportunity to resolve the provocative and explosive question of water in a rational and equitable manner. It represents an international approach to the solution of what is clearly an international problem. The United States would be prepared to assist in reaching such a solution because of its deep interest in establishing conditions of greater calm.

I did not ask the leaders of the Jordan Valley states to accept the principles set forth in the United Nations report at this time. Obviously, they require a reasonable period in which to consider the proposals from technical and political points of view.

At this stage, therefore, I asked them merely to give the program their serious consideration, keep an open mind, and be prepared for further discussions at a later time.

Attitude of the Arab Countries

As had been expected, the immediate reaction of the governments of Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon to the United Nations report reflected the solidarity of Arab resistance to collaboration with Israel. The leaders of these countries made it clear that they could not and would not consider any plan for the development of the Jordan Valley if it contemplated negotiation or agreement between them and Israel. They reiterated Arab insistence upon implementation of United Nations resolutions regarding the partition of Palestine, the repatriation of refugees, and the internationalization of Jerusalem.

I assured the Arab leaders that acceptance of the principles contained in the United Nations report would not prejudice the ultimate disposition of political issues between their countries and Israel.

Nor would acceptance involve direct negotiation or direct agreement with Israel. I assured them that satisfactory evidence of acceptance could be given in the form of unilateral declarations to be filed severally by the participating states with the Secretary General

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or some appropriate organ of the United Nations. Such unilateral declarations would be regarded by the United States as solemn guarantees that the Jordan Valley states would individually accept and abide by an equitable division and distribution of water as contemplated in the United Nations report.

Aside from objections based on their fundamental political positions, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon indicated that serious consideration of the Jordan Valley plan on their part would be premised on the assumption that they might in due course suggest modifications of the plan in their own self-interest. I assured them that any suggestions they might wish to make would receive the most careful consideration. The program of development outlined in the report was not to be considered a hard-and-fast take-it-or-leave-it proposition. On the contrary, the United States would be more than willing to entertain suggestions for amendment from the interested states, provided such amendment was compatible with the basic concept of unified Valley development.

Egypt is not directly concerned with the disposition of the waters of the Jordan. Because of the political implications of the plan and Egypt's influential position in the Arab world, I undertook to enlist the support of the Egyptian government for the unified program. I was able to obtain the assurance of the Government of Egypt that it would exert the weight of its influence in support of the project as appropriate opportunities arose.

Attitude of Israel

The position taken by the Government of Israel was essentially receptive to the thesis that the water resources of the Jordan Valley should be developed in accordance with some plan that would be mutually acceptable to the interested states. Israel pointed out, however, that it had prepared extensive plans for the development of all available water resources. It would be necessary to examine the proposed United Nations program to determine how it would affect plans developed unilaterally by the Israel government. It may be expected that Israel will propose modification of the plan as set forth in the United Nations report, but it was indicated that an effort will be made to adjust present Israeli engineering schemes to conform in general with the principles underlying the United Nations proposals.

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Attitude of Great Britain and France

The Government of France indicated a deep interest in the Jordan Valley proposal and indicated that it would be prepared to assist in gaining acceptance of the project.

The British government, while agreeing that the idea of unified Valley development was sound, preferred, for political reasons of its own, to proceed with caution so far as direct and public support is concerned. It is my opinion that if a favorable attitude toward the plan emerges in the Arab states the British government will be prepared to lend the project its support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A second visit to the region should be made by a personal representative of the President shortly after the beginning of 1954, at which time an effort should be made to bring the Governments of the states concerned to acceptance of the principles of the United Nations report on the Jordan Valley.
2. United States policy in support of the Jordan Valley plan should be firmed up and followed uniformly by all agencies of the Government and American diplomatic missions in the area. Continuous pressure should be exerted on the Governments of the states concerned.
3. The United States should undertake to gain full acceptance of the plan by Great Britain and France. They should be requested to use their influence in its behalf.
4. Specific proposals should be developed regarding the composition and authority of the neutral water control agency necessitated by the plan as the mechanism for assuring equitable distribution of water.
5. A formula should be developed for the submission of unilateral declarations of acceptance by the Jordan Valley states. This formula should indicate the nature of the declarations, with whom they should be filed, and their status as solemn undertakings.

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6. The United States should immediately formulate a firm position with respect to the question of boundaries, and through the mechanism of the Mixed Armistice Commission, or some other appropriate agency, initiate discussions looking to the elimination of the demilitarized zones.

7. Steps should be taken at once to reduce the Jordan Valley plan to specifics in terms of priority of elements, stages of construction, costs, methods of financing. In this connection, the Foreign Operations Administration should instruct its field mission in Jordan to give priority to the development of detailed plans for first-stage construction within the framework of the unified Valley program.

/s/ Eric Johnston

Eric Johnston

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November 17, 1953

REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT ON NEAR EAST MISSION

(Eric Holsen)
SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

United States policy toward the Arab-Israel dispute should aim at practical solutions of practical problems. A political settlement is not possible at the present time.

The United Nations report proposing unified development of the resources of the Jordan Valley represents a practical approach to the basic question of the Arab refugees, the potentially explosive problem of rights to the waters of the Jordan, and the tangled boundary situation.

The Jordan Valley project should therefore be pursued as a central element of American policy in the Near East. Decisions with respect to American political support and economic assistance should be conditioned upon the attitude displayed by the states concerned toward the United Nations proposals.

The Jordan Valley program should be pressed through a second visit to the region in the near future.

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